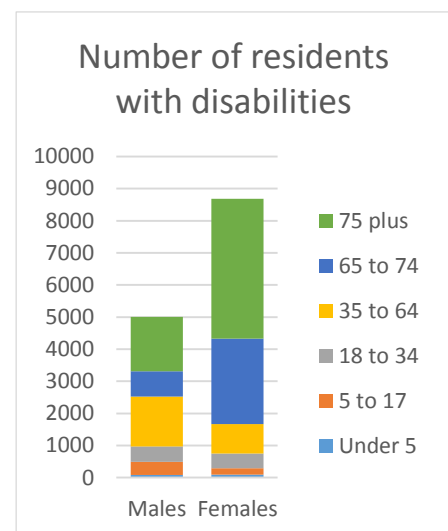


## Introduction

The City of Bellevue is a growing and diverse community of more than 130,000, with thriving high-tech and retail districts surrounded by quiet residential neighborhoods. Census data indicates that nearly 15% of Bellevue residents live with a physical, developmental or intellectual disability, and these numbers are expected to rise as the population ages. The city's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion are reflected in its vision statement, *"Bellevue welcomes the world. Diversity is our strength."* In 2014 the city adopted a Diversity Advantage Plan that included the goals of promoting access and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

The ADA is a broad and comprehensive civil rights law that mandates equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. It prohibits discrimination in access to jobs, public accommodations, government services, public transportation and telecommunications.

The City of Bellevue 2016 ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan is the result of the ADA Core Team's re-evaluation of city programs, services, and facilities to determine the status of ADA compliance and prepare a roadmap for further improvement. It refreshes and expands upon previous ADA assessments and planning work.



ADA Requirements for state and local governments include:

- **ADA Coordinator:** Designate an individual to be responsible for ADA compliance and reporting.
- **Complaint Procedure:** Establish and publicize a procedure for resolving ADA complaints.
- **Notice of Nondiscrimination:** Inform the public of their rights and protections under the ADA.
- **Employment:** Provide reasonable accommodation for qualified individual with a disability.
- **Program Accessibility:** Ensure that all programs and services, when viewed in their entirety, are accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.
  - **Communication:** Ensure effective communication with people with disabilities affecting hearing, vision, or speech, including through the provision of auxiliary aids and services.
  - **Policy and Operations:** Make reasonable modifications to policies and practices.
  - **Integration:** Offer services in the most integrated setting appropriate.
- **Physical Access:** Ensure that city infrastructure meets accessibility standards.
  - **City Facilities:** Make buildings, facilities and parks accessible.
  - **Streets and sidewalks:** Provide curb ramps and accessible paths of travel.
- **Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan:** Review each element above, identify barriers, and describe plans for removing and improving access. Develop in consultation with the disability community.



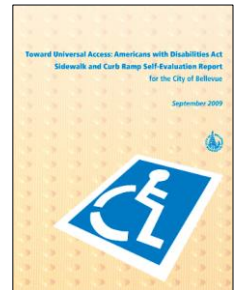
## ADA Self-Evaluation Findings and Analysis

A history of innovation and commitment to access is reflected in the results of the City of Bellevue's 2016 ADA Self-Evaluation. Overall, most programs are responsive to public needs, staff show a strong interest in serving individuals with disabilities, and physical barriers have been consistently addressed and removed over time. The report identifies several best practices and opportunities for excellence. Many programs require further evaluation. Better coordination, more staff training, and more consistent integration of public input have been identified as ongoing needs.

### Best Practices

#### ***Sidewalk and Curb Ramp Program***

In 2009, Bellevue's Transportation Department developed an innovative method for surveying sidewalks and curb ramps using an Ultra-Light Inertial Profiler (ULIP) mounted on a Segway scooter. It generated more far more detailed and useful data at 30% of the cost of a traditional manual survey. The 2009 *Toward Universal Access: Americans with Disabilities Act Sidewalk and Curb Ramp Self-Evaluation Report* won a Transportation Planning Excellence Award in 2012, and the survey method has been adopted by a number of other jurisdictions.



Over 700 curb ramps were installed or upgraded between 2010 and 2015, and virtually all signalized intersections with sidewalks have curb ramps. Many older sidewalks have ramps that are now technically noncompliant because they met older ADA standards or were installed before standards were developed; these are being gradually replaced or upgraded. After a 2012 self-evaluation, the city has nearly doubled the number of Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) that provide audible or vibro-tactile signals for blind pedestrians; 68% of all signalized intersections now have APS. Overlay projects and community-responsive ADA projects will continue to remove barriers, with hundreds of ramp installations projected for the next five years. The Transportation Department's ADA team continues to develop consistent high-level technical practice standards.

#### ***Adaptive Recreation and Park Access***

Bellevue's Adaptive Recreation program for people with disabilities is widely recognized as one of the best in the nation, and serves as a resource for residents of neighboring cities as well. The *Choices for People with Disabilities* Plan provides an outline of the options available, from adaptive recreation to varying levels of accommodation and inclusion in regular recreation programs.

The city has completed professional architectural assessments of ADA compliance at 16 facilities, including Highland, North Bellevue, South Bellevue, and Crossroads Community Centers, City Hall, Bellevue Aquatic Center and a number of park facilities. Most of the barriers identified in Phase I and II of the surveys have either been remedied or budgeted for improvement in the Parks Renovation and Refurbishment Plan. Phase III was completed in January 2016. Parks staff are working to further integrate the assessment findings with public input to determine future barrier removal priorities.

#### ***2015 Comprehensive Plan Update***

The Comprehensive Plan guides city policy on growth and development and reflects the Council's vision for the future of Bellevue. The 2015 update includes a thorough and thoughtful integration of diversity and disability issues in high-level policies and provides a strong foundation for implementation at all levels. Disability and



access issues are mentioned in 21 policy items in eight subject areas; the 2010 plan contained only five disability-related items, mostly in human services.

### **Hearing Loop Installation**

Bellevue has installed state-of-the-art hearing loop systems in City Hall in the City Council Chambers, Council Study Room and in Bellevue Youth Theatre. These systems enable people with hearing aids or cochlear implants to connect directly to the sound system with much better sound quality and amplification. People without a hearing aid can use receivers and headsets to benefit as well. The next phase will install loop systems in several community centers and other high-demand locations, and the old systems will be repurposed to provide access to the Youth Theatre amphitheater and City Hall concourse events.



## **Opportunities for Excellence**

### **City of Bellevue Website Redesign**

The city website is undergoing a comprehensive redesign in 2015-2016; this presents an opportunity to design a fully accessible site that would place Bellevue in the forefront of public website accessibility. The previous site architecture meets accessibility standards, but inconsistencies with third-party software integration and content accessibility pose barriers to many users, particularly for online transactions. Adopting a more rigorous version of web access standards would require some additional funding but yield significant results. For the budget equivalent of building one or two curb ramps, the city has the opportunity to go from good to great in this area.

### **Regional Coordination**

Bellevue's ADA compliance program is already being recognized regionally, and other cities have sought assistance or information on Bellevue's park accessibility, hearing loops, and draft ADA plans. Bellevue has taken the lead in organizing regional collaboration among local ADA coordinators, and has the opportunity to leverage regional resources to improve accessibility and ADA compliance among other cities in the area.

## **Summary of ADA Self-Evaluation**

### **Administrative Requirements**

Bellevue's ADA Coordinator is:  
Jennifer Mechem, ADA/Title VI Program Administrator  
450 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE  
PO Box 90012  
Bellevue, WA 98009-9012  
[jmechem@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:jmechem@bellevuewa.gov)  
phone: 425-452-4471  
fax: 425-452-7221  
TTY relay: 711

Bellevue's city website has an accessibility page:

<http://www.bellevuewa.gov/accessibility.htm>

The page contains:

- Name and contact info for the ADA Coordinator
- Nondiscrimination statements
- ADA complaint procedure
- Access and accommodation request forms
- ADA information and links to city documents, including ADA reports and background info

### **Public Engagement**

- Robust community input programs in 2007 and 2009 informed the development of the Sidewalk and Curb Ramp Self-Evaluation.
- Current efforts focus on input for the 2016 ADA Self-Evaluation and developing partnerships with individuals and organizations representing the full range of diversity in the disability community.



### **Program Accessibility**

- All city programs were surveyed for accessibility in 2007; a new comprehensive survey is recommended to expand upon the qualitative assessments reflected in this report.

### **Employment**

- The city provides reasonable accommodations to applicants and employees, and HR staff are knowledgeable about the ADA. Further study is required to develop formal policies and guidance on accommodations and to evaluate job descriptions, employment tests, and hiring practices.

### **Effective Communications**

- Hearing loops in City Hall and Bellevue Youth Theatre improve access for those with hearing loss.
- Resource lists for ASL interpreters and live captioning (CART) have improved provision of these services.
- Greater consistency and staff training are required to ensure that event notices and city documents contain contact information to request accommodations or alternate formats (large print, Braille).
- TTY access to city phone lines is limited; staff need training on use of relay services, and the city should investigate technology options to increase TTY access in a way that best meets deaf residents' needs.
- City website access is good; content and transaction access could be dramatically improved during website redesign process. Bellevue TV content should be captioned and audio-described.

### **Policy and Operations**

- Bellevue's 2015 Comprehensive Plan does an excellent job of integrating disability access and diversity issues into larger policy and planning goals.
- Detailed review is recommended to identify ADA-related issues in the municipal code, licensing and permitting policies, and contracting and procurement regulations.

### **Emergency Management and Public Safety**

- Community emergency management plans include a focus on vulnerable population planning, with staff expertise in disability issues. Partnerships with disability organizations can further strengthen this area; goals include first-responder training on disability and provision of text-to-911 services when feasible.
- Bellevue's Police Department has a policy on effective communication with deaf and hard of hearing persons. Further review of Police and Probation are recommended to identify ADA-related issues.

### **City Facilities**

- City facilities are generally quite accessible. Most identified barriers are included in future renovation or improvement plans, and public input is being sought to refine priorities for barrier removal.

### **Streets and Sidewalks**

- Bellevue is making steady progress towards making all sidewalks and curb ramps fully accessible. Public input is being sought to refine priorities for barrier removal.

### **General Recommendations**

- Develop a comprehensive staff training plan and consider ADA coordinators for each department.
- Consider establishing an ADA advisory body and a regional ADA Coordinators network.

